The George Washington University Oral History Project
Interview with Walter Fauntroy
Conducted on October 12, 2001 by Zachary Schrag

ZS: Zachary Schrag is interviewing Dr. Walter Fauntroy. It is Friday, October 12th, 2001, at a little before ten in the morning, and we are at New Bethel Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Now, I first want to just ask how you became aware that there were plans of a rapid transit system. I know that your brother worked for WMATA for a long time. I didn't know whether he was hired first or whether you had become sort of involved in transit planning before his hiring.

WF: I became aware of the plans for Metro in 1959, during the course of what I call a year of evaluation and preparation for my church ministry. I was born in this neighborhood and grew up in this city, and all of my higher education was against this background of what I saw and smelled and understood about the neighborhood. I went to Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, for undergraduate work, where I met Martin Luther King, Jr., and then to Yale University Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut, where, for three years, I did my divinity school training and my –

ZS: Sorry, I'm just getting a little static here. Okay, sorry. Please continue.

WF: Yeah. Well, for three years I did my divinity school training and my community practicums. It was at that point that I ran into something called urban renewal. Mayor Dick May of New Haven was becoming a leader in the whole area of urban renewal, and worked with a gentleman by the name of Ed Logue out of Boston in putting together a

renewal in New Haven, the pain of which I ran into in my practicum work in the Dixwell Avenue area. When I finished Yale Divinity School in 1958, I became the supply pastor of this church, New Bethel church, my home church, in July of that year, right after graduation. And in 1959, on January 19th, I was called as pastor.

At that point, I began a year of evaluation and preparation, the purpose of which was to develop a twenty-year plan for the growth and development of the church in light of what I could (indiscernible 3:04) reliably establish as what would be the trends. When I engaged in that study, I became aware of the subway, and became keenly aware of two movements of gentrification that dictated that the best thing for me to do was to move out to Soweto, what was called Ward 9, what is called PG County, build a church, and wait, because of two developments that were occurring in the city.

The first was one which took place in my youth after World War II. It was the systematic removal of low and modern income people, generally black people, in particular, from Georgetown, on the thesis that it had become too valuable land and too potentially valuable a tax base to have poor black people living on it. And using something called Code Enforcement, they had run through Georgetown, systematically displacing low and moderate income people by insisting that they either bring their homes up to code or would have to have it taken by eminent domain, or they could sell. And so, they sold, often, and would move to challenge the people in Southeast Washington, who were primarily whites who had moved in during World War II from the South to take on "government employment."

As a consequence of that, Georgetown had changed and people I used to visit when I was a kid were no longer there. By the time I got back in '59, they had begun something called Southwest Renewal, which indicated an impatience with slow rehab code enforcement-type activity. And they started urban renewal, so that when I began my evaluation of what the work of the church would be for the next twenty years, I concluded that they were going to wipe out Southwest, and that I happened to grow up in and live on the most valuable land in the world, and it was nine blocks from the U.S. Capitol and six blocks from the White House, and that therefore could not expect to remain.

I decided, however, by July of 1960 that I wasn't going to join in the flight, that I was going to stay and fight. And as a consequence, on August the 10th, 1960, I addressed a NAACP rally declaring that urban renewal is nothing more than urban removal, the removal of black and poor people from valuable downtown land. At that point, and I'm just giving this to you to reference, this is the story of the renewed area, this is a statement that I did sort of summarizing what we planned to do. This is a speech called "The New Reconstruction," in which I, on August the 10th, 1960, said that urban renewal was urban removal. Later to be a friend of mine in the House from New Jersey, Frank Thompson, called for an investigation of the charges once it hit the paper, and as a consequence of that I went to work to prepare a response to the suggestion that the colored preacher didn't know what he was talking about, and obviously it would be in the best interest of the nation and the nation's capital that Southwest go forward.

I then took a year or so to study urban renewal very carefully, and came up with this five-point approach to doing renewal, which called for five things: one, full and effective citizen participation in the planning of the renewal; adequate relocation for people who would be displaced; and a better focus on re-use plans that focus both on – not just on redevelopment smashing down, but rehab; and fourth, that there would be a positive emphasis on neighborhood rehabilitation, so we'd do Georgetown-type rehab without smashing everything as was done down in Southwest. And finally, that there would be an effort to make plastic houses to cheapen the cost of housing construction, and that was in 1960.

And thereafter, I began organizing around the people – around our interests. I then took a year or so – well, I had Dr. King's movement, the '63 march, and in '61 it was the Freedom Rides and in '62 it was a place called Albany, Georgia; in '63, it was Birmingham and the Freedom Rides and the civil rights measures. And in '64 it was lobbying for the bill, and in '65 the Voting Rights Act. At that point, I asked Dr. King – excuse me – and because it was ripe for this kind of thing to be done because –

ZS: You mean Shaw?

WF: – with Shaw – because Johnson had come to power and he had something called demonstration cities, which was very encouraging to me because I realized that we couldn't do anything about this without coordinating and concentrating a whole variety of

federal and local programs, and that demonstration cities legislation proposal caught my eye, and I plunged immediately into seeking to make of this neighborhood such a demonstration. The legislation had not passed, but I was maybe (indiscernible 10:09) with Johnson and his people, so I encouraged them to encourage the RLA to include that.

ZS: Who in the Johnson administration were you talking to?

WF: Well, Joe Califano at the time, and to an extent Bill Moyers, but Joe Califano was the point person. And Pagison. What's that fellow's name? No. Well, there were several of them. But they were key guys. And so, come '66, we got approved for a new kind of renewal that gave us the ability to employ our own planners.

ZS: A new kind of renewal, you say?

WF: Yes, a new kind of renewal: with, by, and for the people. With the people in that the planning of it would be done with them by providing them with the professional competence to, in fact, plan. By the people in that we would train people in the skills required for renewal so they'd make the money. And for the people in that we would have a number of people with what would be rebuilt and what would be made available. It would be affordable by low and moderate income people, and that meant that we had to have a lot of government church-based cooperation. So we did a lot of that.

To get to your point, as we were getting that all underway, it became very clear that the subway system which was being planned was planned with a view to bringing in the people who made most of the money in the city under us and getting them back out in the evening with a Red Line and a Blue Line and an Orange Line. At that point, with the level of planner that I had available to me because of the grant, Reginald Griffith, who was the planner for MICCO, and the social and economic plans that we had, we developed the concept of a Green Line that would service the most transit-dependent areas, and thus would be most cost efficient, and that's where as briefly chairman of the WMATA board, having been appointed by Mr. Johnson, I was able to push the Green Line and got it in.

ZS: Let me ask you a couple of questions about that. In terms of the timing, the official count, and I don't know if this is right or not, but in June 1969 – and there were hearings over the regional plan because originally they just authorized a very small system and then in '69 Congress authorized a much larger system. And WMATA submitted for the record a statement that the original plan for just a Columbia Heights spur off of what's now the Red Line had been changed, or they started thinking about changing in October 1966 after the Shaw urban renewal funds were announced, and that it was at that point in the fall of 1966 that the National Capital Transportation Agency contacted the RLA and you, saying maybe we could have another trunk line. So does that sound about right to you? Do you recall anyone from that agency? And I'm not sure, again, when your brother was hired by them –

WF: No, he was hired in '60. But in '67, I began to clamor for a Green Line that would service our area. And I can't remember when this – that it was dated, but this is at that time. Warren Quinsted was chairman of the National Capital Transportation Agency, the NCTA, and so that was the fruit of those years of agitation around it.

ZS: Okay. Did you work at all with Professor Franklin Edwards of Howard University? Because I know that he was also agitating for a line for this neighborhood.

WF: Oh, without question. Yes. He was one of the social – we had social planners, economic planners, and fiscal planners, all headed by Reg Griffith, who later became the NCPC director. And the tie to Howard University grew out of something that President Nabrit instituted in the decade of the sixties, which fed into this. It was something called the Action Alert Communications Log, but it was called the Action Research Community Service Project of Howard University, and New Bethel Church located the first health center right at our church. And by 1965 – in fact, 1965 I was the speaker at the Howard University commencement by the time that Johnson broke in on me and insisted he be allowed to speak too, because he wanted to announce his Great Society programs. By that time, Frank and a number of professors, including people in engineering and architecture and particularly in sociology and social scientists, were involved with us and assisting us in developing the plans.

ZS: Okay. Because he, of course, was also on the transportation agency board, and also on the Planning Commission, so it seems to me that he was maybe the inside man while you

were the outside man, or something, and then of course you later become the inside man yourself. So you were working as allies in pushing for this line.

WF: Oh, without a question. Yeah.

ZS: And was it hard? I mean, the thing is, there are these hearings in 1967 where Walter McCarter who was then the head of the agency, and lots of others say, we just can't afford to have a mid-city line. At that point they're talking about deleting the Columbia Heights spur so that they can have the line through Southwest. All of these reasons why they just can't afford it, and then it seems fairly suddenly in 1967 they changed their position and say, oh, sure, we'll have a third trunk line. So it's just a little hard for me to explain that sudden switch on behalf of the planners, first the National Capital Transportation Agency and then the WMATA itself.

WF: When we started (indiscernible 17:37) you'll notice in the article about a new kind of renewal that a guy by the name of Wolf Von Eckardt poo-pooed the idea that citizens could be involved in planning, and it was a nice little thing to give his children money, but the poverty program, all of it, it's just a joke and nothing would happen. By 1967, by the time we demanded that there be a line service, this thing had gotten such momentum, I mean people were planning, and we had the confidence. And the fact is that Reg Griffith came up with the rationale for the Green Line taking its turn at U Street, because Howard wanted to go straight up Georgia Avenue, right by them. What we proved was that the reservoir and all of that open space there, nobody is there to get on the line. If

you cut it back across here and go up to Columbia Heights and back, you pick up in – and so there was just nothing they could do with the facts. It was superb work on the part of our planning team and the people who said, yes, this makes much more sense, and I don't care about those dumb white folks downtown. They don't understand what's going on. And so that I was very interested in that, and as you know I have recused myself from voting on it, but it was so clear.

ZS: You recused yourself as a WMATA board member?

WF: Yes.

ZS: How did you find Griffith originally? He came out of MIT, so how did you recruit him?

WF: I'll say this, that he escaped from Harlem and went to MIT and worked for five years with Ed Logue, so he understood renewal. And we just threw a broad net out at this thing, and we were going to do a new thing and we wanted a citizen planner, somebody who was willing to come in and be at the direction of a board of neighborhood people. Marjorie Lawson, then for a period of judge appointed by the Kennedys to the court system here, juvenile court system, left that post to be free to work with me and Flaxie Pinkett and other people who were in the neighborhood who were clear on –

ZS: What was that last name?

WF: Flaxie Pinkett. She ran the John R. Pinkett Real Estate Company, which was largely the African American manager of real estate for the Board of Trade and eventually the Federal City Council. So that he was at the level of search that we put out, and I don't recall just how – well, I knew it was Marjorie who brought Reginald's resume to my attention.

ZS: Okay. In talking about the evolution of urban renewal, from this very destructive process to something that you saw that you might be able to control, was Adams Morgan an important precedent? Because this is in the late 1950s where they're not going to demolish the neighborhood. It's somewhat more – it sort of seems to me a bit of a transition. There is code enforcement, but there is also a lot of effort to recruit people and do a more bottom-up approach.

WF: Yeah. I was not aware of that at the time. Adams Morgan seemed at that time to be, in my view as I recall, not a place where large numbers of low and moderate income people were (indiscernible 21:45). It reminded me of what happened out on Wisconsin Avenue at – what was the name of the place? There's an area between Wisconsin Avenue around Macomb Street – McLean Gardens – which was really an effort, a valiant effort on the part of moderate income people to keep from being displaced by what was going on, and so I had sort of viewed our task of that of taking the least of these and galvanizing them into a force to protect their interest in the land. So I wasn't aware of that as much, although I was keenly aware of what happened in Georgetown.

ZS: Well, we have those negative models of Georgetown and Southwest. I guess my question is, were there any positive models?

WF: No, there were none.

ZS: Okay. So you were making it up from –

WF: I was making it up from scratch because I'd seen it in New Haven.

ZS: It's in the destructive part.

WF: Yeah. And I had been hearing about it in my civil rights work in the south. A lot of people came down from Detroit and from Chicago and from Cleveland and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, and they were reporting the same thing, and so I did sort of focus kind of sharply on that.

ZS: Let me ask you this, and this might be the key question I have for you today, is that when I look at the urban renewal programs of the late fifties and early sixties in Southwest – I don't know New Haven too well, but in Detroit, in Chicago – usually where you see urban renewal, you see a highway going through it. That is, very often city governments are going to finance the urban renewal in part by, they spend a certain amount of money and they get matching funds both for the highway and for the urban renewal, and you're clearing all the land out anyway, so part of the Southwest program is to put the Southwest

Freeway through it. So my question is, in those five points of the new kind of renewal that you mentioned, transit is not one of them, but it seems to me that that was another necessary condition, that if you're going to have serious renewal without the massive destruction, one way to do that is a machine that can transport a lot of people without paving over whole blocks of land.

WF: Yeah, we had a committee. We called it the Citizens Committee for Homes or Highways, and it was based primarily out of Georgetown with Polly Shackleton, who was my colleague on the council. And we found common cause in that, because they were doing the Southwest Freeway, but it was to come right up through here, New York Avenue, and in fact it was planned to take what is now the Bible Way Church on New Jersey Avenue, the pastor of whom was a very influential Democrat here, and who was a part of our network. The key point is that what we eventually ended up doing was taking the air rights over the part that was coming into Shaw and building housing on top of it, which has not yet been completed, but it was the Mount Carmel Baptist Church. All of these parcels were claimed by churches, and on them were built government subsidized housing, so it'll be for the people who are being displaced. So, yes, that was a factor, and we were drawn into the homes and highway question because of what the highway was doing to homes in Southwest.

ZS: So you were definitely anti-highway. I guess my question then is, could you have imagined this dramatic renewal, as proposed by MICCO, without a metro line at all?

WF: No, no, could not. No, no, we had 600,000 people, 600,000 cars going through Shaw every day, because the Federal Triangle is right down there, so it was just folding in and coming straight through. For example, these units are built so that they turn in. The front doors used to be on the street. We turned them all in, so you'll see all along the plan. We only got to do two years of the plan, because we took $92 million worth of land buying the domain. We took what is now the convention site, buying the domain and declared for UDC, and we had the clout to get it done, much to the distress of the business community which wanted the subway all new after. And wanted the –

ZS: The freeway. The northbound?

WF: No, they wanted the convention center where it is now, where it's now being built.

ZS: New one. Yeah.

WF: Yeah. They wanted it then, but we had so much clout that they had to put it off to the side. And for thirty years they suffered until Newt Gingrich took over and they dislodged U.S. District Government and took the land and are doing with it what they want. But that had started two years after we got underway in the renewal that we planned that we never were able to finish.

ZS: I should ask just a quick question, which is, during all these discussions in the 1960s, this line that's now the Green Line was always referred to as the Mid-City Line. So I just

wanted to get your sense, having spent all your life here, how can I use that term? What is the Mid-City exactly? Because I know that Shaw, for example, is a brand new term in the 1960s named after the school, so does the Mid-City – is that a term that people used prior to Shaw?

WF: Yeah, they used it prior to Shaw, and the reason I like the Green Line is that we wanted access to the money. And the jobs that were developing were developing in the suburbs. That was one of the rationales on which we said – we said to the people here. You've got to work – the jobs are developing out there, and they want you to go all the way down to 7th to get a subway, and don't want you to come down from 14th Street. We must have this so you can get out. So the Green Line made good sense.

ZS: Were you active in naming that line?

WF: No, I was not active in naming –

ZS: I mean after you left the board, right?

WF: Yeah. I was not active in naming the line, but I thought we called it – well, we would probably call it Mid-City.

ZS: I just know that there's Mid-City Post Office, and it's a term that comes up sometimes.

WF: Yeah. But no, we sort of transformed that because we wanted it to be the whole city, and it does give – the remarkable thing about that, after we got all these units here built and got the subway stop here, we suddenly found out that it gave you access to the whole region. And we found out because the people who had been coming in in their cars to pick up their drugs decided, look, they're taking our tag numbers and embarrassing us, so what we'll do is get on the Shady Grove Line at Shady Grove and come in under them, come up to these stops here, and I had two gangs servicing them and shooting at one another because some of their customers got off at the wrong end of the Shaw stop.

ZS: So were they selling drugs right at the Metro station?

WF: Yeah.

ZS: Didn't know that.

WF: Yeah, they did. You go by even now, but we quieted it down now. As I said, before the subway, they would just come off 7th Street, the main corridors, and then they'd drive through here. And the drug users were in the habit of taking out children and getting them to hold the stuff after school, because people were coming home after work, and they'd just stand around and hold it, and if they got caught with it, they were juveniles. So it was annoying. But after that, that was no problem. We were just taking tags. Now that the tags stopped, the subway opened up, I said, "Oh."

ZS: Just to go back to the MICCO plans, this was the official image of a WMATA station from the annual report in '68 or so, and this is how your group redrew it for the MICCO pamphlet, "What Kind of City Do You Want?" or, "What Kind of Neighborhood Do You Want?" And I just wanted to ask you about this image, because I just love it, how – I mean, I take it these are African Americans –

WF: Oh, without question.

ZS: – claiming the subway as their own.

WF: And going to make the money.

ZS: Yeah. So they're dressed in all (indiscernible 31:11) clothes –

WF: Yeah. We're going to make the money, the Green Line.

ZS: Do you have any recollection of who did that drawing or how it came to be?

WF: No, but Reg would. Reg Griffith. He may have done it himself. I don't know.

ZS: I just love it because it's so anonymous. I mean, this is sort of the official version of the top down. You've got cardboard cutouts. It's a Metro without real people, and it's MICCO that's putting the people in the Metro and putting neighborhood people. So

these people are going out to jobs, and the other people – it's got two functions. It keeps some of the cars off the street for people going through Shaw, and then for people who live in Shaw, it's access to employment and other opportunities.

WF: Yeah.

ZS: Okay. Now, as you said, you've got this great plan and there are some disappointments, one of which is that Metro itself doesn't open until 1991, having been originally scheduled to open in 1980, I think. And, of course, the Green Line is last of the lines to have any stations opened, and by 1984, it looks like there is Metro everywhere and nothing in the mid-city. So how would you account for that long delay? I know, for example, at one point you argued that the Green Line was the first line.

WF: Should have been the first, yes.

ZS: Again, this is 1967, I think, one of those ten statements. So why was the Green Line the last, and why did it take so long?

WF: I'm so glad you asked the question because I'm fully prepared to answer. And before I do this, let me just get you the First Action Year Plan.

ZS: Okay, so we've got the MICCO First Action Year Plan. From what year is that?

WF: This is 1969. And I think it starts with this statement: "I fear I was too clear to everybody as to what we planned."

ZS: Okay, so, "Renewal by the people," it says. "Design and construction by black architects and black construction companies either in joint venture with white friends or its all black undertakings, 350 young men from the black community will be trained. The non-violent transfer of ownership and control of land to the people of Shaw to be developed by them and for them."

WF: Yes. This is the first – this is the (indiscernible 33:55) the Shaw development plan and its objectives, represent a blending of the philosophies of these two great plans into what I call non-violent land reform and (indiscernible 34:06) program. So we said, oh my goodness.

ZS: Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, non-violent but control of the land.

WF: Yeah. And the First Action Year Plan took $93 million worth of land, took it by eminent domain from the owners according to a plan that the public had agreed to, and turned it over to nonprofit sponsors to build.

ZS: So who were the owners at that point?

WF: The government, and they turned over this block. This was new construction. So they're new construction. We took out several, so here's parcel one. These were four parcels that we did Turnkey III, public housing. As the people moved in, they paid their public housing rent and the government paid the difference between that and the mortgage, and they were owners so that fifteen years later, the child wanted to go to school, they could mortgage their income, made their payments for that, and so that's how we did – those were four parcels. This was a parcel taken by eminent domain and turned over to the First Rising Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

ZS: And this is parcel five.

WF: Parcel five. Not the Zion Baptist Church, not the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, not the Zion on the mountain that's rising, but the First Rising Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 217 units' worth of housing. Parcel seven is the church, my church, seventy-five units of housing, all by eminent domain. This was the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, all getting this property. Parcel 11 is the library. We got the Watha Daniel Library there. The Shaw School, the new school, just taking land. This is the parcel 13, which is now the Reeves Center at 14th and U. And this is that unit right there.

So that was the First Action Year, and we started acquiring and displacing and telling those that had plans for the Reeves area that you will not have a convention center there, it'll be UDC, and we're going to fill in this plan with, by, and for the people. We'll give you Logan Circle and a few other places, but it's going to be an integrated community

socially, economically and racially. At that time, my national work plugged in, and there became available a seat in the Congress for a non-voting delegate. That is, he could not on the floor but he could vote in committee.

ZS: Excuse me. I realize I don't know too much about how that bill got passed. I've read a lot about the creation of the council, but not too much about the non-voting delegate.

WF: I'll tell you how it got passed. Dr. King used to ask me why I worked so hard with the voting rights, and I told him I worked so hard delivering the South because we would not be free in Washington until our people were free to vote in the south, because the brutal denial of the right to vote gave control of the Congress and of the District to a infamous coalition of southern Democrats and the conservative Republicans, specifically in Washington. It gave it to, in my lifetime, a man by the name of John L. McMillan, who was chairman of the House District Committee, from South Carolina. And he was chairman of the committee for twenty-two years of his thirty-three years in the Congress, and he benefited from something called the Good Government Fund, which had been developed by the Federal City Council here, a group pulled together by the *Washington Post* in the Phil Graham years, that they figured could control the city if they could raise some campaign funds and distributed them to the chairs of the Authorizing and Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate, and so they did.

And what those chairs did was invite their friends to come to the committee. They wouldn't have to do any work, just come there and give you your proxy and what they

want in terms of tax policies in the district, what they want in terms of who these three commissions are going to be, what they want in terms of contracting they will get and just show up. So they were ironclad.

In 1965, we got the board on the right track, and Dr. King and our group went straight from Selma to Florence, South Carolina, and Horry County in Myrtle Beach, and other places where I knew Mr. McMillan, with 29 percent of the electorate but only 3 percent of the voting, black, would be in trouble. And we spent five years, from '65 to '70, registering people. And the number of blacks registered went from 3 percent to 29 percent.

ZS: Of all voters.

WF: Of all voters in the district. In 1970, therefore – and I can show you this if you'll pause.

(Audio Part 2 Begins)

ZS: Okay, we're resuming and we've got a map of the congressional districts.

WF: On August the 6th, 1965, we left the White House that afternoon and came up to 14th and U, where I had a march from 14th and U down to the White House, to say thank you for getting the voting rights, now we want Home Rule, Mr. President. And the thesis was that he knew, and Joe Califano and others knew, that the South had not voted for a

Democratic candidate for president since '48 when South Carolina's Thurmond switched parties (indiscernible 00:50) rights, and said we will vote – we'll control things in the South Democratically on the Congress, but on the presidency, we're going to vote Republican. So they would say, "Oh, it's nice you go register (indiscernible 1:03) help me."

And in South Carolina – first of all, the red dots are districts where the blacks are from 26 to 40 percent of the electorate, not enough to elect a black to the Congress, but enough to determine which white can win. So as soon as we got this Voting Rights Act, we went to South Carolina and did our registry of our people, and as a consequence, this is what happened, and then this is when we got the bill. I have it right here. And this is the march. So we went to South Carolina and registered from 3 percent to 29 percent, and in the primary of 1970, we ran a black for Congress with three whites in the race: McMillan, this gentleman and this gentleman. They split the black vote, he won the primary, but not with a majority; 48 percent, just missed it, but he won. So it had to go into runoff.

ZS: And this is Claud Stevens.

WF: Claud Stevens. He was a Howard University-trained medical doctor. He won, but we still went into a runoff, and he lost when this vote went with him. But that put the fear of God in them, and so people started saying, "Johnny, I really think I'm going to leave the committee," in (indiscernible 2:36). So on my way back from the runoff, I looked at the paper and see that a non-voting delegate position has been created. Why? Good

question. I'll tell you the answer. The answer is that Johnson said, "Oh, yes, I'm for Home Rule, and we're going to get it." And so we craft a Home Rule Bill and introduce it 1967, new Congress, introduce it. McMillan says, "We will not have a hearing on it, and if you want to discharge it from my committee, go get two-thirds of the House to do it."

And he killed it, killed the Home Rule thing. And that's what made me decide we've got to go get him. We must have McMillan, because he can do this. And here's the president of the United States. So, you know, he said, "Go to hell." He said, "I'm in charge over here, and I've got my guys, who are very happy with the way things are, and they're not going to change unless you can get two-thirds, Mr. President. You're going to spend (indiscernible 3:47) go ahead." So it was killed. And it was at that point they said, well, let's go for something like, how about a non-voting delegate or something, because we all poo-pooed that. But what I understood coming back here – and this is a flyer when I had people going down to try to get –

ZS: This was mid-1970, another campaign to (indiscernible 4:20) Johnnie Mack.

WF: Yeah, and that's when we lost. Then what happened was that I chose to run for the delegate office for the reason that it didn't matter to me I couldn't vote on the floor. Nobody wants to be (indiscernible 4:36), but you can vote in committee, and most important you had a frank. A frank is a right to freeze. I think he might freeze in here. I mean, I'm running, and I won, and I took the names of about 100,000 people I had

collected in the march on Washington, and Selma and Montgomery, and I wrote them and introduced my Home Rule Bill. At the same time, I ran for president and organized the people in the 5th Congressional District and all over the country, whose names I had, to run uncommitted slates to the Democratic Convention, block them, and then be able, at the critical moment of the first ballot, if nobody had it wrapped up, to have them come to us, and that happened. In the process, I also ran a fellow by the name of John Jenrette, because we said this will not work, and they'll do this every time. You'll get a black in, he'll win the primary, and they'll just dial up and Mack will be there, you know, until he dies. So we ran John Jenrette, no black –

ZS: In South Carolina.

WF: – in '72. And when that happened, we defeated John McMillan. And then all the other people who heard about Johnnie Mack ain't going back. Said, you know, Home Rule is pretty good. So that's how we got it. But I mention that because when I got into Congress, they said there's something wrong with a member of Congress being president of a local neighborhood group that's taking land by the acres and turning it over to people who are not acting in the interest of the whole country and the whole city, and so they challenged me and had the attorney general to call and to see whether or not (indiscernible 6:44) he looked and looked. I wasn't taking a salary. All I was doing was going to meetings in my neighborhood where I had – because they also said all he's thinking about is Shaw. How about the rest of the city? You know, and so they went to Southeast, people said, "Well, no, no, leave him alone."

Bottom line is, the attorney general says, nothing wrong. He is chairman of a board that's being directed; it's not he all by himself. And so that got us through the second action year. Third action year, they said either you resign or we're not going to fund it.

ZS: The Nixon administration.

WF: Yeah. And I resigned, and the planning stops. The action stops. And Wolf Von Eckardt gloated that, "I told you it couldn't last." So now we are faced with this situation. We're faced with a situation where people tired of spending three hours in a car coming in to make their money and then going back out have decided this is valuable land. And so, gentrification is running wild in the city, and much of what we had planned is now being enhanced, but not for the people and their –

ZS: Well, when would you say that gentrification really started?

WF: Well, I think World War II. After World War II, we decided, look, you know, Lincoln was here in 1865 when they came, and we can understand why they piled in here, but it's now a situation where we are the most powerful nation in the world and people are tired of spending three and four hours of a day sitting in their car driving in and out, and there's value here, so that a home in which I grew up, that my father paid for four times in thirty-six years, which we acquired by eminent domain and had it rehabbed and sold

here for 17.5, less in monthly payments than he was paying rent. The house next door to it sold for $493,000, a row house around the corner here.

ZS: When was that?

WF: Last month.

ZS: Last month, okay.

WF: And you will see all of Shaw.

ZS: What I'm trying to figure out, I mean, it seems to me that a lot of that happens – the District loses so much of its white population after 1960 or so, and I'm trying to figure out – and a lot of its middle class population, both black and white. And it seems to me that there are always some stories about some people at Logan Circle who've got the iron bars up and the big dog and are rehabbing the house. But I just wonder if there was not a wave in the last ten years where it's a lot more visible, those $400,000 houses.

WF: Not a wave. There's been a torrent.

ZS: A torrent. So my question is, how much of that is Metro? That is, when I look at the *City Paper* or something, they've got the Harrison Square development on V Street, a block away from the E Street Metro. Houses, units starting from the low 300s or something,

they say, for a two-bedroom unit. I mean, you know, these are essentially luxury townhouses in an area that for a very long time was slated for some kind of renewal, but nothing was happening. It seems to me only in the 1990s that that torrent breaks.

WF: Well, it started a little before then. That's one of the reasons I left the Congress, because my good friend Marion Barry had so wounded the process that it was ripe for a complete takeover, and it has happened, and it's over. I mean, this is going to happen. I always said that it would be a mixed blessing. We'd get out there or they'd get less chance to get in here, and I don't know if we can fight economic forces, and those economic forces are powerful now. They are very powerful, so that the gentrification, particularly with the boom we had the last eight years – I mean, people with gobs of money, particularly homosexual couples have come in as pioneers with two incomes, take a place that costs them 20,000, put a million in it, and everybody's taxes goes up all around, and people get priced out of the market. That's why one of the things I've done has been to put together an Asset-Controlled Area Partnership, which is –

ZS: What's the name again?

WF: Asset-Controlled Area Partnership Program, which was launched by my colleagues on the Banking Committee in '98, which concludes that there are some things, some assets that cities have to deal with the crisis of affordable housing in our cities today, and that is they do own FHA, VA, tax-acquired properties and the like, so assemble those and turn them over to a group that will rehab them for low and moderate income people, and that's

what we're doing now. But it's just a finger in the dike. We're becoming Paris and London.

ZS: Right. And I guess my question is, had you foreseen that in 1969, had you worried – I mean, the thing about the Green Line is it's great to say we're going to build this line so that people who live here can have access to the whole metropolitan region, but in some ways it seems that it backfired in that –

WF: No, no, it didn't backfire. The irony is the value we created here with the subway through Shaw is something that I had planned for economic empowerment. What has happened is that when the subway system got in and people saw it and understood it, and my friend Marion Barry delivered to Ollie Carr everything downtown, and when this field opened up, the business people that I had planned along this corridor to be empowered by the subway on U Street are now being displaced systematically. In fact, Parcel 13, the building that we insisted needed to bring 2,000 people here every day who wouldn't be able to go home to get lunch. Why? Because you can get it right here, and shopping and the like. That building now is under pressure for privatization.

ZS: Is this the Reeves Center?

WF: Yeah. I mean, say, fellows, look, you know, really, governments you could make – but we buy this from you, you know, because we're creating Dupont East. You understand that?

ZS: Yeah. Well, I mean, historians love irony. It just seems so frustrating, though, that when you do create all that value, the very people who were supposed to benefit get displaced, and I guess my question is, can you imagine it having come out differently? Was there one point where someone made a mistake, or is that just the way of the world, that poor people will always live in less desirable neighborhoods because they are poor?

WF: No, they will be displaced from valuable neighborhoods because they are poor and we'll be living in the plastic houses that were built pursuant to my point four, and they will reclaim Georgetown and Southwest and Shaw, and can change it from Shaw to Dupont East.

ZS: So how do you feel about that? After forty years –

WF: After forty years, and I'm going to tell you, the critical point – because we had the plan, and the structures are getting prepared. The critical point was when I was forced out of MICCO. And my planner was moved up to plan for the region, and the guy that got in behind him just couldn't handle it. And without me there, it just fell apart. And with policies that were – I mean, because I had to focus on Home Rule in issues around the world and governmental issues. If I had been able to concentrate on this, I could not have done it without the frank. I could not have gotten McMillan out without the frank, because I had to create a whole nationwide thing which they have members saying to McMillan after he was defeated, say, I want no parts of the District Committee. Give it

to Walter, whatever he wants (indiscernible 16:34) and do whatever they want with it. I have no party because the Federal City Council can't provide me enough money to buy it back support, because these people are connected.

And I tried that with the Home Rule question, and I think had Marion been focused on that first paragraph and what it meant to be the chief policymaker on the most valuable land in the world, much of what we had envisioned would have happened, so it wasn't that irony. It was just a failure to keep focus, and I could not keep focus when there were so many forces.

ZS: So were there any specific policies – I mean, I don't know too much about what happened to MICCO after you left, in large part because most of what I know about it comes from your papers at GW. So, you know, they sort of end. I mean, I understand that you had to be on the sidelines after being nudged out. Were there particular policies that really went wrong? Was it Barry's alliance with Jeffrey Cohen? I mean –

WF: Yeah, it was a little of that.

ZS: – it was just a lot of steps.

WF: They just got so excited about the Nixon and Reagan policies that rewarded real estate development that they went to the downtown area and enhanced all of those, and just sort of left them until the nineties, and then they said, well, let's go for it all. And, for

example, this whole hub here was planned for the development, and nothing has happened. It's just sitting there.

ZS: That's?

WF: That's 7th and Georgia Avenue there in town. After we did this and this – and these have just not happened. They just stopped. They said, thus far and no more. That's that. And so it just laid fallow and awaiting, and in the meantime, people were acquiring stuff, and now one company, one real estate guy has just pretty much bought everything that's not tied down except for what I've been able to salvage.

ZS: Who's that?

WF: I can't really say.

ZS: Okay.

WF: I can't reveal the name. But they've done – so I've got this salvaged, but it's not that – it's 5,000 houses across the whole city, so it's nothing. But at least it's not going to be Chocolate City, we'll be Chocolate Chip City. So it's an irony, but it's not one that you can't trace to its causes and its effects. And when we were forced to abandon Johnson's paid-for experiment, and whether or not you could renew a community with, by, and for the people, they just waited. They built the other convention center, that other box down

there, and when the business people got in charge with Newt Gingrich and Marion was vulnerable, they took the government. They took it systematically. Every agency of the federal government was placed into receivership.

ZS: And the district chairman.

WF: Yeah. And in the process, the gentrification just is gone.

ZS: To get back to the role of Metro itself in all of this, do you have a sense of why? I mean, the line that I've sort of traced is that because Mid-City Line was the last to be added and was slated to be the last to be constructed, because they had already done a lot of the design and engineering on the other two lines with now the red and the blue, orange trunk lines, what Jackson Graham said in his interview with Darwin Stolzenbach, is that, yeah, it was going to be at the end, but what really slowed it down were all the many indecisions by the district government. That is, if you looked in the early 1980s, late 1970s, there are all these studies, well, maybe we should have a sort of a zigzag pattern, so we'll go up closer to Howard, or how many station entrances do we want.

And there is a lot of study, and you see this I think in part because the D.C. Council was so new. That is, in other jurisdictions – well, in Montgomery and Arlington particularly the county councils were very strong and decisive, and they said here's where we're going to do and we're not going to talk about it anymore. We're going to get building. In D.C., there was a lot more talk, a lot more negotiation, and I wonder if that really did

slow things down. And then, of course, once it's sort of finally at the top of the list, Ronald Reagan is president, and he cuts the appropriation in half so that all the construction closed down.

WF: Yeah. I'll tell you, in '73, it broke. That's when we got off track. Had we been able to do a MICCO, and I had planned to do that – because what we had was a government. We had a government. The function of government is to facilitate five things: access to income, education, health care, housing, and justice. And I had put together the whole thing, and it functioned. That's how we got that far. When I was dropped out the picture, and I was absorbed over there. I couldn't be MICCO. I really couldn't do both jobs, but I had made the decision to go this way. And we created a government, and we had new people, of course, but that would have been no problem had the community been organized and clear about what's in the best interest of us, and it was never done.

ZS: So that was the question. The MICCO brochure is called, "What Kind of Neighborhood Do You Want?" Montgomery, they knew what kind of neighborhood they wanted. They wanted a county where all of the development was clustered around Metro stations, and what was left in-between was lower densities in parks and farmland. They knew exactly what they wanted, so they got what they wanted, and they got it quick. D.C. didn't quite know what it wanted.

WF: Precisely. And that's because, you know, it takes growing up here, it takes watching New Haven and coming here and understanding and then planning, and then executing

with a lot of clout, and without all those ingredients – there are people right now who don't know what Shaw is all about. They don't know what Shaw – all they know is it's called Shaw. They don't know why it's called Shaw and what Shaw attempted to do. Only guys like you look at it carefully, can get a sense of it. And knowledge is power, and we don't have the knowledge out there, and you get done-in all the time. And I'm not being hopeless, but when I look at that and remember that year, that period, we had it all figured out.

We were going to have pockets of high-income areas, Logan Circle area. We were going to have a commercial up here beyond that. We had it all figured out, and we saw it radiating – it could've fit. It fitted the whole city, because we had a comprehensive planner who could rationalize everything that he suggested to the people. And when we lost that and planning went up top with people who really know what they want, it became difficult. So I don't blame it all on the subway, but my greatest disappointment is that we have not been able to do around our subway stops what I had in mind, and that was real power sharing.

ZS: Right. It seems to me that the subway is kind of like urban renewal itself. It's a source of power, and the trick is to wield that power.

WF: Yeah, but if you don't wield it, you become its victim, and that's what's happened.

ZS: I have just a couple questions that are not about Shaw, that are more about your service on the council and the Congress in general. I guess we've talked about your opposition to the highways. One question I had was, would the Inner Loop have actually taken New Bethel?

WF: No.

ZS: Okay. And I know it would have taken some churches. My big question about your service on the council is that when the D.C. City Council is created in 1967, it's a very big deal. I mean, after most of a hundred years of rule by the (indiscernible 26:20) commission, with all the public works decisions being made by an army officer, essentially military rule of the Capital for those points, you come in and the engineer commissioner is gone, but the D.C. Department of Highways remains with, I believe Tom Arris was in charge, and I would –

WF: That's right. And Natcher.

ZS: Well, Natcher, you couldn't do anything about, but why wasn't there more of a cleaning house of the D.C. Highway Department?

WF: Because of Natcher. I'm telling you. Listen, the appointed council was an apology for not being able to beat McMillan, understand that?

ZS: Uh-huh.

WF: Natcher said, "Okay, okay, okay, okay."

ZS: Yeah, Califano has a great capture on this in his book. I don't know if you've seen it, *The Triumph & Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*. This is his White House memoir. He's got a great chapter on the creation of that council.

WF: Yeah. Well, I've got to read that. But the bottom line is that after this, he says, "I want to get it. You guys, you go ahead and help me get reelected in '64," and we did. We did a ten-city tour. I took him to ten cities, took Martin to ten cities, carefully selected, saying, "We're not here to tell you who to vote for, but we're not going to vote for somebody who says extremism in the name of liberty is a virtue, and wants to send people to Vietnam, because they're going to send you and your children first," you know. Well, he won. And he said, "I'm getting you Home Rule." And McMillan kicked the partners behind him. He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to – I will get an appointed council, because I can reorganize the government. I don't have to change it."

And still the reins were in the hands of the apparatus over there. I mean, John McMillan is still chairman, Federal City Council is still distributing its Good Government Fund, everything is well. And one of my frustrations right after I got over there, I'm vice chairman of what, you know? I looked down the line there and nobody paid any attention to me, because all of that was up there, and Arris was one of those.

ZS: Okay, so could you have fired him or you –

WF: No.

ZS: Because Natcher would have cut off all your money, or –

WF: Well, listen. First of all, I couldn't get him – I may have wanted it, but I couldn't get eight votes to do it, because we were not elected by the people to make decisions. We were appointed by the president. In fact, the first thing he did for me was to – for Congressman Scherle of Iowa noticed that I had been going to black (indiscernible 29:15) front meetings with Stokely Carmichael, and said, "He ought to be ashamed of himself. You appointed him, you ought to dis-appoint him." And I had to tell Johnson, you know, "The Lord is my shepherd. You appointed him. You can dis-appoint him. But I'm going to the meeting." Because if I'm not in there as a factor, you know, you're going to have real problems. And Joe Califano, I don't know if you wrote about that, but he understood. He said, aw, just go ahead, forget it. Tell the president, tell him go to hell. And, you know, Johnson couldn't do that (indiscernible 29:48) picked a Republican from Iowa. So there was nothing you could do about that, and that's why I had to go for the jugular. I mean, that's why I had to go for this.

ZS: But that appointed council did, of course, for a while say it was not going to build the Three Sisters Bridge, and there was that feud with Natcher throughout 1968 –

WF: Yeah.

ZS: – while you were on the council. I mean, you must have met Natcher personally, both on the council and in Congress.

WF: Oh, yes.

ZS: And can you tell me how he ticked?

WF: Well, you know, I found him to be a pretty fair guy after I got up there. Of course it helped that McMillan had gone down, and the character of the Authorizing Committee has changed substantially.

ZS: Yeah. So McMillan lost in 1972 –

WF: Yeah.

ZS: – which was just before the Three Sisters Bridge vote, so maybe one of the reasons Natcher never brought it up again – I mean, I don't know what you could have done to him in Kentucky. It's such a safe seat.

WF: No, no. No, it was just that things were shifting. I mean, boy, they left it – the Southern (indiscernible 30:58) said look, "We do not want the district to be used against us the way it was used against McMillan. He's a nice fellow, but if he'd have been smart, he'd have (indiscernible 31:08) on that thing and pat him on the back and then taken him to North and South Carolina, and said, "Look, your man's good." But he didn't do that. And we're not going to get – so, you all, you know, they don't have but – but Charles Diggs is the chairman and he working out (indiscernible 31:20). And, boy, Natcher was, as you recall, very hard on the subway, on the Metro. You know, it was becoming a crime thing down there, and people won't be able to get off and that kind of thing. But he came around on that, and the Three Sisters Bridge issue is an example of, I think, the changing nature of the alignments.

ZS: Yeah, you know, I haven't put that together. McMillan loses in November of 1972, and something like early December – I'm not sure I have the date right down here, but it's December 2nd or something, so just a few weeks after that, the Metro appropriation and the Three Sisters Bridge and the (indiscernible 32:09) fight and all that happens right after that. So Metro gets its appropriations for that year that keeps Metro alive by thirteen votes. Do you think any of those votes might have been watching what you had done to McMillan?

WF: Well, I'll tell you, and you will not read this anywhere. It won't be understood until I write this, but I ran for president in '72, and I got enough delegates, ninety-six to be exact, to call a press conference three weeks before the convention and say it's over. We

will decide who the nominee of the party will be. McGovern has so much, Humphrey has so much (indiscernible 32:51). None of them has enough to go on the first ballot. I've got ninety-six. And I thank God for Medgar Evers and all the people who made this possible. And we made McGovern the nominee of the party.

ZS: How come? Why did you pick him?

WF: Because he responded to our agenda, something called the Washington Agenda, and he said, I'll do everything – he'd say, "Since you've protected your twenty-three delegates in Washington from Humphrey, who would have won had I not run, and since you lined up that, and my only hope is getting that 2 million new people who are ready to vote in '72 who were not able to vote in '68 and in '64." So they gave it to us. And as a consequence, while McGovern went down, the lesson was that this vote, this giant which has been asleep, is awake, and no point wrapping the District of Columbia around your neck when your people don't give a damn about the district anyhow. They are doing no – how are you doing on my farm legislation, how are you doing on steel in Alabama, you know, and that kind of thing.

ZS: One person I don't understand is Robert Giaimo of Connecticut –

WF: Yeah, I had a time.

ZS: – in that he fought Natcher really hard, and I don't know what was in it for him. Had you known him at all?

WF: No. It was refreshing, but it was – never quite hooked that up. There must have another connection that somebody had. But he was vigorous. I'm trying to remember who succeeded him. Was it Chris Dodd? I can't remember. I'm sorry. It could have been a Republican, I don't know. But, yeah, I don't remember.

ZS: I just wonder if you have any particularly favorite stories about that fight. You know, the image I have of that December – it was 1971, not '72. December 1971, the big vote on Three Sisters Bridge was, as I understand it from the *Congressional Record*, Giaimo actually lost on the voice vote, demanded the teller vote. He and Natcher were the tellers, along with two others. So can you describe that scene to me on the floor of Congress?

WF: You know, I can't even remember it. But all I know it was one of those – I was on a roll during that period. I mean, it was just so much opened up in a matter of a couple of years. Once we returned in '70 with that picture and people understood it, they said, "Well, you know, the cat's out of the bag now. You know, we've got to give these people a break." So a lot had happened, because people were uptight about their own political careers and didn't want to be damaged by any kind of racial overtones.

ZS: Let me ask you just one more congressional question, which is, after 1971, there are of course many bills in Congress, but the next big one is 1979, the Stark-Harris Bill. And I

know that you, along with people from Maryland and Virginia, Herb Harris, of course, and others, had to sell this bill to your colleagues from around the nation. You're saying, guess what? Metro is not going to pay for itself out of the fare box after all, it's going to take another couple billion dollars, which is a lot of money. How do you persuade someone from Michigan or Louisiana or anywhere –

WF: It was hard. It was hard. I'm just trying to rerack my thinking there about that. By that time it was clear that Metro is probably the only thing we're going to have as far as I was concerned, because –

ZS: In Shaw, you mean.

WF: Yeah. And that once you had it, you could maybe force (indiscernible 37:41) to turn over the land he had acquired for the kind of development that you had in mind, and I'm just trying to remember the '79 fight. Think I'd have to go back to my books. I did very careful planning for every Congress, and with a high priority of what I voted for, and that was one of them. That was the end of Carter. Yeah.

ZS: Yeah, and Carter didn't like Metro at all, from what I could tell.

WF: That's right. Yeah, I had difficulty with Carter. In fact, I supported Ted Kennedy in that part of the year, in that run for the presidency, for the nomination, and Carter never forgave me for that. I'm afraid I can't be helpful unless you could just jot it down –

ZS: No, I mean I have Herb Harris's version of that, and obviously as a named sponsor of the bill, he was very active. I mean, part of it goes back to Carter's relation with the city, and it didn't seem like he had much of a relationship with Washington, D.C.

WF: No, he didn't.

ZS: I mean, it seems to me, obviously you had some trouble with the Nixon administration, but it seems to me that Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon were all very committed to Washington and involved in it, eager to give it both more economic development and a better physical structure and more political rights, and that since Nixon, no U.S. president has been particularly interested in the welfare of D.C.

WF: It's pretty good. Pretty good. Certainly not Reagan. Clinton even didn't know.

ZS: Yeah, he had that one walk up George Avenue, and that was about it.

WF: Yeah.

ZS: Okay, well, I think those are all the questions I have unless you have anything to add.

WF: No, I want to get out of here now. I've got to do something.

ZS: Okay. Thank you so much for your time, and I'll stop the recording now.

[End of interview]